

Book reviews

Morals, Science and Sociality

Edited by H Tristram Engelhardt, Jr and Daniel Callahan, The Hastings Centre, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, 1978. Pp 408 Price \$7.95.

This book is the third volume of a planned four volume series being produced by The Hastings Center, Institute of Society, Ethics and the Life Sciences. The point of the ambitious project is to investigate 'the foundations of ethics and its relationship to science' (Preface, p ix). The first volume came out in 1976 and was concerned especially with medical problems, as its title *Science, Ethics and Medicine* indicates. The second volume (1977) was concerned in particular with ethics and religion, and the present one is concerned in particular with the effect of science on ethics and with various other inter-connections and mutual influences of science and ethics. In view of its subject-matter the present volume is of less interest to readers of this *Journal* than the first volume. The authors are highly distinguished in their fields, for example, there are contributions from the philosophers Alasdair MacIntyre, Stephen Toulmin and Gregory Vlastos, and from the molecular biologist Gunther Stent, to name just a few, and they do all make an effort to understand each other's points of view. Moreover, the editors attempt to give the book unity by dividing it into four parts, concerned with the moral roots of science, the foundations of ethics, the scientific roots of morals, and the roots of ethics and science; but the overall impression is one of fragmentation rather than of unity. One also suspects that many of the authors are giving us summarised versions of what they have said or are going to say elsewhere. But to those readers of this *Journal* whose interests are strongly philosophical the book has something to offer, although it is more a book for the

library or piecemeal consultation than for personal purchase or continuous reading.

R S DOWNIE

Man Against Disease: Preventive Medicine

J A Muir Gray
pp 192, Price (Paper) £2.50
Oxford University Press 1979

Patterns for Uncertainty? Planning for the Greater Medical Profession

Gordon McLachlan,
Barbara Stocking and
R F A Shegog (Eds)

Published for Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust by Oxford University Press, 1979, pp 214, Price (Paper) £4.50

Uncertainty prevades both the medical worlds which these books explore. The first one is apparently mainly concerned with preventive medicine, whilst the second addresses the large subject of manpower planning. But Dr Muir Gray, a well known proponent of health promotion, ranges far and wide in an exceptionally honest and thoughtful treatment of the problems besetting his admirable ideals. The second volume has the imprimatur of the Nuffield Hospitals Trust and its editors therefore have excellent credentials. Criticisms and suggestions from such a source must command respect. Yet both books offer no confident predictions or prognoses.

Dr Muir Gray organises his material historically, comparatively (as between developed and developing countries) and on a life cycle framework, to sort the main disorders, diseases and disabilities which we would all dearly like to prevent or modify. He accurately catalogues the present uncoordinated arrangements for reducing health hazards. Although many of today's diseases are theoretically prevent-

able, because their causes most probably lie in the environment, our knowledge of specific causative agents is in practice still strictly limited; confusion reigns, for instance, over cardiovascular diseases, arthritis and most cancers.

We are also very short of accurate epidemiological information on the effectiveness of many currently popular nostrums and regimens. As far as the new field of health education is concerned, we know little about the impact of our feeble and poorly financed efforts to modify health related behaviour, far less about the long consequences upon morbidity and mortality of changing life styles.

'Uncertainty', says Muir Gray, 'is the basis of science, and scientific medicine is full of it'. But he points out that when doctors share their own uncertainties with their patients the latter don't like it. Indeed people can become so anxious about the multiplication of health hazards that their actions may be a directed more to allaying their fears than actively to minimising the risks.

So the problems facing prevention are not confined to knowledge. They are also psychological, ethical and political. How far, for instance, is it permissible for Governments to protect adult citizens from the consequences of their own actions? How justifiable are widespread screening programmes, with the possible provocation of anxiety amongst the many for the sake of uncovering hidden pathology in the few? Also Muir Gray does not let us forget the major influence which poverty and the sub-culture to which someone belongs can have upon their experience of disease and the value they place upon health.

The multi-authored Nuffield Trust volume of commissioned essays contemplates the entire NHS labour force and more besides. The spiralling costs of the service have at least drawn academic attention to what is its main revenue expenditure.

The NHS is one of the largest employers of labour in the country and, since the health care professions provide an essentially personal service, it is bound to remain highly labour intensive. So it is somewhat disillusioning to discover just how little is known about the distribution and movement of these manpower resources, the paucity of research and, apparently, the lack of arrangements for continuing analysis.

Shegog makes these points with devastating critical force in the final chapter of this volume.

Barbara Stocking considers what are now tactfully termed 'the complementary health professions', revealing the complexity and confusion to

which both past history and present mistrust have contributed. Reedy treats the delicate topic of 'substituting' one kind of worker for another, a theoretical way of economising in Britain, but one which is still viewed with foreboding by many rival professionals. Engleman contributes a very necessary analysis of the external economic and political influences which impinge upon health service spendings. Three essays treat the related topics of manpower, information, model building and planning.

But planners in the human services have to contend with more than a paucity of information. By the very nature of their material they are

subject to the vagaries of human hopes and wishes. They can never be sure if people will do what they predict or recommend, for instance, enter training for a profession or subspecialty in sufficient numbers. With the best models at their command, planners are subject to the opposing short term objectives of alternating political masters. At another level they are liable to naive surprise at the sudden unionisation of previously neglected ancillaries and shocked by the recalcitrance of suddenly 'selfish' nurses and doctors.

Thus medicine, in both its substance and its direction, remains a modern mystery.

UNA MACLEAN